

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Haywood County kids hit the water

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

The headwaters of the Pigeon River are just off the Blue Ridge Parkway. The river flows northwest across North Carolina's Haywood County, crossing into Tennessee before joining the French Broad River. The town of Canton, North Carolina straddles the river and is home to a paper mill that was the historical source of water quality problems that eliminated much of the life in the river for miles downstream - one of the most egregious examples of water pollution in the Southern Appalachians.

In recent years, the mill has dramatically cleaned up its operation, and its fitting, then, that against this backdrop the local watershed group, Haywood Waterways, works with the Haywood County school system to get every public school eighth grader in the county into the Pigeon River each year to experience and learn about it first hand. Hundreds of students visit Canton Recreation Park, just upstream from the paper mill to collect and identify fish and macroinvertebrates with aquatic biologists, and learn about water chemistry and watershed health.

650 students turned out for this, the twelfth year of the Kids in the Creek program. Haywood Waterways is helping create a generation of Haywood County residents who are literate in water issues – knowledge that will become increasingly important as water resource issues become increasingly important in a South inhabited by more and more people and where rainfall patterns are likely to become more and more erratic.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.